Percy Foreman: Ray Killed King to Be 'White Hope'

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Trial lawyer Percy Foreman testified yesterday that jailhouse interviews convinced him that James Earl Ray alone assassinated the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., in the hope of becoming a white hero.

Ray admitted in one lawyer-client interview that his conspiracy story involving a mysterious contact named Raoul was a fake, Foreman testified.

In another interview, he said, Ray said he left assassination evidence behind in Memphis because wanted former prison friends to know he had killed King.

"Ray did think shooting Dr. Martin Luther King would make him a hero to the white race," Foreman told the House Assassinations Committee. "He thought he would be the white hope."

Denying Ray's charge that Foreman coerced him into pleading guilty, the Houston lawyer said the plea was Ray's idea because Ray knew that otherwise he would be executed for the April 1968 murder of King.

Ray is serving a 99-year sentence. He contends he is innocent and thought he was participating only in a gun-running operation conducted by a man he knew only as Raoul.

But Foreman testified that Ray admitted in one of their interviews he made up the Raoul story for the book "He Slew the Dreamer," written by William Bradford Huie under contract with Ray.

"He told me there was no Raoul," Foreman said. "He said he made Raoul up because that was what they wanted.

"He said Raoul was the operator of a bawdy house he held up once."

Ray said in another interview, according to Foreman, that he deliberately left behind the assassination rifle and belongings with his fingerprints on them so former prison friends would know he had killed King.

"He said, 'I didn't care. I wanted to leave them there because I wanted the boys back at Jeff City (Missouri State Penitentiary) to know I did it,' " the lawyer testified.

"I think he wanted credit for killing King but he didn't want to be caught," Foreman said.

He said Ray frequently talked about an emerging race war between whites and blacks.

"I asked him once if the reason he wanted to go to Africa was to kill some more black people and he said, 'Yeah, I guess you could say that,' " Foreman testified.

Foreman denied he recommended that Ray plead guilty to King's assassination. Ray himself suggested that strategy to prevent his execution, Foreman said.

The lawyer said Ray vowed no prison could hold him more than two years, and that if he stayed behind bars longer "I will throw a writ"—prison jargon for a writ of habeas corpus complaint that the prisoner did not get a fair trial.

The committee produced a letter Percy wrote Feb. 13, 1969, advising Ray to negotiate a guilty plea, but Foreman told panel members that "you're taking that out of context."